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Summary

The Tri-continental Conference, perhaps a desire of the extremists not to disrupt the forthcoming elections, and perhaps a hesitancy on their part to undertake any more acts of terrorism at this time as a result of increased GOG vigilance, have all resulted in a remarkably quiet month of January. However, ferment in the extremist ranks was evident, as Luis Turcios, head of the FAR, and Fidel Castro both elevated the MR-13--FAR feud to the international level, and as both accused the MR-13 and its leader Marco Antonio Yon Sosa of falling under the influence of Trotskyist elements. Yon lashed back by accusing Castro of having become a pawn of the Russians and of having lost his capacity for revolutionary leadership. At the same time, rumors were heard that possibly the communist party (PGT) might be considering an end to violent action, preferring to return to peaceful political activity, infiltrating democratic institutions and trying in other ways to obtain power. However, if that is the case, Turcios obviously has not yet gone along with the plan as he broadcast from Havana repeated calls for violent revolution in Guatemala.

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January was one of the quietest months for some time, with almost no guerrilla or terrorist activity. This was in marked contrast to the month of December, when guerrilla kidnappings and other extremist strikes caused rightist elements to enter into unsuccessful conspiracies the object of which was to topple the present Chief of Government, Col. Enrique Peralta. These accused Peralta of being unable to cope with the terrorist situation, and sought to replace him with a new military junta (but none of the plots came to fruition).

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There were probably several reasons for the suspension of activity. First, of course, was the fact that the Tri-continental Conference was taking place in Havana, and Luis Turcios, chief of the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR) attended with several of his cohorts. While the Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre (MR-13) did not send representatives, at least the chief of one of the two guerrilla units in Guatemala was out of the country. It can be assumed that not much would be planned or executed by Turcios' followers during that time.

Secondly, the possibility exists that the guerrillas were content to "lie low" for a while following their earlier kidnapping successes, particularly as GOG forces began to react more and more strongly to each successive terrorist attack. Having obtained considerable money from the ransoms paid, and finding that risks were getting greater when kidnappings were attempted, it would have made sense for the extremists to suspend operations momentarily.

However, a third and interesting thesis also exists. The extremists may have decided to suspend violent operations for fear that their continuance might provoke a premature coup which would be detrimental to their plans. As a matter of fact they came very close to bringing about the replacement of the present Chief of Government by a "stronger" military junta. This in turn may have meant elections would have been postponed, a development which the communist party (PGT) would not have favored.

In giving credence to this theory, it must be kept in mind that the PGT is convinced elections will do nothing to solve the country's problems. According to the PGT analysis, the GOG will make sure that a rightist party wins the elections. The left, then, will unify with the PGT in open and violent protest against the "imposition," and rather than having to fight the forces of the GOG single-handedly, the PGT will have a majority of the Guatemalan people with it. On the other hand, if by some fluke the moderately leftist PR wins the elections, it will provoke a coup from the right, and again there would be a popular uprising. Finally, under the possibility that the PR not only wins but is permitted to take office, the PGT is convinced that [illegible] Guatemala's ills needs remedies much greater than those called for by the PR. Since the PGT is convinced that the PR will fail, a disillusioned people will have nowhere to turn except to the communists. Thus, no matter what happens, the PGT seems to feel elections will fail to solve the country's problems, that the people must be given the opportunity to learn this the hard way and that no matter how things go, the PGT will emerge the eventual victor.

The Tri-continental Conference

The Tri-continental Conference was obviously important to Guatemala, since Guatemala was repeatedly mentioned as a prime target for subversion. As a result, its subversives are presumably more likely to get increased support financially, with supplies, and by training from Cuba. Turcios spoke at least once on radio

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Havana, a broadcast which was clearly heard by many in Guatemala, particularly on the Atlantic Coast region, and was quoted at length several more times. In his "live" broadcast, Turcios recounted many of the events which have taken place recently in Guatemala, of course highly colored to reflect constant guerrilla victory. He reiterated that the guerrillas plan to open a second front, and commented that U. S. intervention was expected as a result of guerrilla victories. When that intervention came, said Turcios, the FAR would have supporters throughout the country.

The FAR--MR-13 Feud

However, of much greater importance, these broadcasts and Fidel Castro's speech at the end of the conference brought into the international limelight the feud existing between Turcios' FAR and Marco Antonio Yon Sosa's MR-13. Turcios accused the MR-13 of being heavily influenced by, if not actually taken over by, Trotskyist elements. Until these elements are purged, Turcios is quoted as saying, reunification of the guerrilla forces is impossible.

But it was the acceptance by Castro of this thesis that perhaps was the most significant event. Castro, in his speech to the conference, praised Yon Sosa as a patriotic officer, but accused him of permitting a Trotskyist to take over political direction of the movement and said these were strong reasons to doubt "his attitudes as a revolutionary leader." "Fortunately," added Castro, "...the revolutionary movement is being saved...(by) Major Turcios." This was followed by a lengthy encomium of Turcios who was described as a man of vision compared to Yon Sosa.

Yon Sosa's yelp of anguish was heard all the way to Mexico, where the MR-13 issued a press release accusing Castro of "betraying the socialist revolution." Castro, said the communique, was actually serving imperialism with his attitude. Not only that, but he was acting disloyally in his attack upon the Chinese (re rice shipments to Cuba), and in fact, was showing to the world that he had taken "the last step" in total subservience to the Soviet Union and "has forever lost all authority as a revolutionary leader."

In a subsequent special issue of the MR-13's clandestine publication El Guerrillero, the attack upon Fidel Castro became even more virulent. The question was pointedly asked: Where is Che Guevara, and the answer was implied that he may have been eliminated for not bowing to Soviet pressures. Castro is practically called a bourgeois deviationist, following the "counter-revolutionary" plans of the Soviet bureaucracy, and according to this document, he will not be absolved by history. Interestingly, Turcios' name is not even mentioned as Castro bears the totality of the attack.

The polemics are important, since they reveal that differences between the two groups have not been patched up, even if on occasion the two may have worked

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together for some specific objective. Now that Turcios has taken the battle to the level of Castro, it will be difficult to see how any real cooperation between the two groups is possible, unless Yon Sosa is prepared to lose all "face", admit his errors and "ignorance", in Castro's words, and permit his former lieutenant to become his chief.

They are also important since it would appear as if Yon Sosa is becoming increasingly isolated. Presumably, Turcios succeeded in obtaining a commitment from Castro that whatever aid will be given to the guerrillas will continue to go to the FAR and not the MR-13. Without logistical support, without the prestige of Castro behind him, with no other wealthy international backer around, the MR-13 could be facing an increasingly bleak future and in fact, could slowly wither away unless something comes along to rescue it. It has already been reported (A-342) that Yon Sosa may have suffered a loss of prestige in the area of his greatest strength, Izabal, where these broadcasts were heard.

Finally, in an international sense, the polemics are interesting since they have forced upon the scene the Sino-Soviet conflict. On the surface both groups emphasized the national character of their struggle, and avoided clear-cut identification with either side. Now, however, the MR-13 has more and more come out on the side of the Chinese (who unfortunately for the MR-13, are not able to provide much assistance), and the FAR on the side of the Soviets and Cuba.

Position of the PGT

The Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo (PGT--the communist party) seems to be having some ideological troubles too. The PGT has clearly stated that it is in favor of elections taking place, as mentioned above. However, some reports have been heard that PGT leaders have decided that armed revolution is to be abandoned as a party tactic since it has not brought about any significant change in Guatemala despite close to five years of guerrilla operations. In fact, according to this analysis, at the end of five years, the guerrillas could not even claim the loyalty of more than a few extremely isolated villages in the same area where they started so long ago. As a result, these PGT leaders feel emphasis should be given once again to infiltration of non-communist organizations, peaceful political organization, and similar activities which will bring the PGT to power by gradual erosion of democratic institutions and organizations.

However, these reports have little in common with the belligerent statements of Luis Turcios in Havana. It is also striking that Turcios was the head of the Guatemalan delegation and not one of the more senior party members. This could mean that Turcios still has free rein, or that "war hawks" still have the ascendancy in the party and that the "doves" are only a splinter group.

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Actually, if such difficulties do exist, they may provide one solution to the FAR--MR-13 feud. If the PGT were to abandon violent revolution, Turcios would find himself fighting without Guatemalan party support. This could drive the FAR and MR-13 together again to continue the armed struggle as one, unified guerrilla organization.

Events of the Month:

As stated above, very few extremist acts have occurred during the month. The Army mounted a counter-guerrilla operation in the Sierra de la Minas, named operation Tomato, but by the end of the month it had failed to encounter any guerrillas. In Quezaltenango, the police captured some extortionists who had been using the name of the guerrillas to obtain money from wealthy residents in the area, but in fact were merely several local thugs who knew a good thing when they saw it. In a small village in El Progreso, a group of uniformed men entered the village, took some uniforms and arms, kidnapped the wife of one of the local inhabitants, cut communications lines, and disappeared in a stolen car. Again, it is difficult to ascertain exactly who did this, and it could well have been another band of thieves. Finally, the auxiliary mayor and an Army corporal in Los Amates, Izabal, were reported to have been shot to death and mutilated, supposedly by guerrillas. The bodies were found on January 4.

For the Ambassador:

Edward V. Nef

Edward V. Nef
Second Secretary of Embassy

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